



## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY: How Much Is Needed?

### Young Children (2 to 5 years)

Children ages two to five years should play actively several times each day. Their activity may happen in short bursts of time and not be all at once. Physical activities for young children should be developmentally-appropriate, fun, and offer variety.

### Children and Adolescents (6 to 17 years)

Children and adolescents should do sixty minutes or more of physical activity each day. Most of the sixty minutes should be either moderate- or vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity, and should include vigorous-intensity physical activity at least three days a week. As part of their sixty or more minutes of physical activity, children and adolescents should include muscle-strengthening activities, like climbing, at least three days a week and bone-strengthening activities, like jumping, at least three days a week. Children and adolescents are often active in short bursts of time rather than for sustained periods of time, and these short bursts can add up to meet physical activity needs. Physical activities for children and adolescents should be developmentally-appropriate, fun, and offer variety.

### What is meant by “Age-Appropriate” Physical Activities?

Some physical activity is better-suited for children than adolescents. For example, children do not usually need formal muscle-strengthening programs, such as lifting weights. Younger children usually strengthen their muscles when they do gymnastics, play outside, or climb on playground structures. Also, the skill and coordination needed for complex physical activities may not allow for younger children to participate safely. It is important for child care facilities to promote a variety of physical activities that are structured and unstructured so children of all ages can enjoy physical activity and increase their likelihood of life-long adherence. Many physical activities fall into several categories (moderate- and vigorous-intensity and muscle- and bone-strengthening), making it possible for children to gain multiple benefits with each type of activity.

### Key Terms

**Moderate-intensity Aerobic Physical Activity:** levels that are at intensities faster than a slow walk, but still allow children to talk easily. It increases your heart rate and breathing rate. You may sweat, but you are still able to carry on a conversation; you can talk but you probably can't sing.

**Physical Activity:** any bodily movement produced by the contraction of skeletal muscle that increases energy expenditure above a basal level; physical activity generally refers to the subset of activity that enhances health

**Sedentary activity:** non-moving activity like reading, playing a board game, or drawing. Sedentary activity does not provide much physical activity and/or exercise

**Structured Physical Activity:** Caregivers/teacher-led, developmentally appropriate, and fun; structured activity should include:

- Daily planned physical activity that supports age-appropriate motor skill development. The activity should be engaging and involve all children with minimal or no waiting.
- Daily, fun physical activity that is vigorous (gets children “breathless” or breathing deeper and faster during typical activities) for short bouts of time.

**Unstructured Physical Activity:** Child-led free play; unstructured activity should include:

- Activities that respect and encourage children's individual abilities and interests.
- Caregivers/teacher engagement with children, support for extending play, and gentle prompts and encouragement by caregivers/teachers, when appropriate, to stay physically active.

**Vigorous-intensity Aerobic Physical Activity:** Rhythmic, repetitive physical activity that uses large muscle groups, causing a child to breathe rapidly and only enabling them to speak in short phrases; typically children's heart rates are substantially increased and they are likely to be sweating.

American Academy of Pediatrics, American Public Health Association, and National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education. 2010. *Preventing Childhood Obesity in Early Care and Education: Selected Standards from Caring for Our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards; Guidelines for Early Care and Education Programs, 3rd Edition*. [http://nrckids.org/CFOC3/PDFVersion/preventing\\_obesity.pdf](http://nrckids.org/CFOC3/PDFVersion/preventing_obesity.pdf)

June 2012

**ShapingNJ**, The State Partnership for Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity Prevention

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